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# The Bureau of Philanthropic Research

An Agency for Community Self-Analysis and Cooperation

By Abraham Oseroff

Executive Director, United Hebrew Charities of the City of New York

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June, 1917





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Executive Director, United Hebrew Charities of the City of New York



Address to the National Conference of Jewish Social Workers  
Pittsburgh, Pa.  
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21

# The Bureau of Philanthropic Research

## An Agency for Community Self-Analysis and Cooperation

To the many existing agencies in New York City coping with the problems of social work a new organization was added when the Bureau of Philanthropic Research began its active existence a little over a year ago. So short a period in the early life of any social agency can hardly be a fair criterion of its possibilities. On the other hand, in view of the multiplicity of institutions and individuals engaged in charitable work, presumably covering almost every conceivable phase of social need and because of the complexity of effort arising through the magnitude of the general community problem in New York, the work thus far undertaken should prove an interesting indication of the potentiality for service of such an agency as this bureau. It was my intention to include in this paper a statement of the theoretical and practical reasons leading to the establishment of this agency in New York City and of its relationship to the general problems of philanthropy. Unavoidably, however, because of limited time I found it impossible to devote myself to the preparation of such a paper. I will try to lay before you today the actual experience of the bureau during a twelve month period, with the hope that those points which are not clear will be brought out in discussion and through the asking of questions.

The organization of the bureau consists of a board of nine trustees, supplemented by an advisory committee of fifteen, under the chairmanship of Dr. Lee K. Frankel. The advisory committee includes experts on various phases of philanthropy. There is, for example, an expert on relief work, on child care, on industry, on immigration, on agriculture, on medical work, on work for girls, on education and recreation. The executive staff consists of a director, an assistant director, a staff of investigators and clerical workers. Requests for proposed surveys and studies are received in the executive office and submitted to the expert on the advisory committee, under whose experience such a study would naturally come. The proposed study is then brought to the advisory committee, with whose recommendation it is submitted to the board of trustees of the bureau, the latter taking final action. Upon the completion of the survey it is again presented in the same manner,



and after consultation with the advisory committee is finally brought before the board of trustees with the recommendations of this committee.

The work of the bureau thus far indicates four logical departments:

A division of Surveys and Research.

A division of Inspection and Information.

A division of Accounting and Record-keeping.

A division of Training School and Personal Service.

The first two mentioned are now actual departments of the Bureau's work. With regard to the latter two, the experience of the Bureau merely indicates what can be done should such departments be added.

The Division of Surveys and Research includes work of a purely research character, together with social surveys of a practical nature. One such survey, for example, was a study of day nurseries in New York City. Fourteen institutions under Jewish auspices were covered and an intensive investigation was made of each of these. Their experience and work was compared with that of non-Jewish institutions in New York City and in other parts of the country. Specific defects were pointed out. Definite recommendations for changes were made and a careful set of standards for day nursery care was prepared. Some of these institutions were found to be of a very high type and in standards compared favorably with the best in New York City and elsewhere. In other of the institutions, however, the study indicated conditions in urgent need of correction. A few of the institutions were found to be located in quarters totally unsuited to their work, defective in fire protection, space, ventilation and lavatory facilities. A few are inadequately equipped, lack proper sleeping accommodations and proper dining facilities. The furnishings in some instances are dilapidated, the walls barren, with no effort to provide a congenial, cheerful atmosphere for the children. Sanitary precautions sometimes are not observed, the minimum regulations of the Board of Health not being enforced. One or two of the nurseries were found in unclean condition; capacities fixed by the Board of Health were exceeded, toilet articles were used in common, lavatory facilities were defective, scant provision being made in some instances for the bare physical needs of the children. In some instances adequate medical supervision was not provided. Little attention was paid to the possible remedy of



physical defects of the child discovered in the medical examination at admission. A few of the nurseries were found poorly managed by incapable executives, hampered in turn by undue interference on the part of boards of managers. Low salaries and conditions of work called for reform. The cöoperative phase of the work was found especially backward in some instances. The few cöoperative media existing were not utilized and some of the nurseries, despite their proximity and their common problem, had no contact with one another. Some of the nurseries failed to rise to the proper conception of nursery effort, little being done for mothers or for children beyond physical care. In one or two instances practically no investigation was made before the admission of a child into a nursery. In some instances proper leadership, an essential factor, was lacking.

The Bureau submitted this report to its committee on day nurseries with instructions that the committee make itself thoroughly familiar with the situation and reach the managers of these institutions with a view toward raising the general standards of day nursery work done under Jewish auspices. This resulted in the organization of a conference committee, whose membership consisted of the president of each of the day nurseries investigated. From among these a chairman of the conference committee was chosen. A conference on day nurseries was arranged and held in the Russell Sage Foundation Building, the attendance reaching over 200. The morning session was devoted to papers on subjects of immediate importance to those interested in day nursery work. One paper presented the results of the survey; another, by the Director of the Bureau of Child Hygiene of the City of New York, showed the relationship of that department to the day nursery; another paper, by the head of a large child-caring institution, pointed to the day nursery as a phase of child-care; still another paper showed the relationship between general relief work and the day nursery. The afternoon session was devoted to round-table discussions for members of boards of managers and members of the staffs of the various nurseries. Following this conference, separate conferences were held in the Bureau's office with representatives of each of the institutions, in which defects in the particular institutions were pointed out and plans made for improvements.

I have presented the results of this survey in some detail merely to show the method of action adopted by the bureau for the introduction of proper standards in institutional work. The

cöoperative method of presenting the results of a critical survey as done in this instance is especially important. It should be noted particularly that the conference, intended primarily to receive the recommendations of the bureau was arranged by and held under the direct auspices of the institution people themselves, the conference committee including none other than the presidents of the various day nurseries. As a result of the conference, improvements in a number of the nurseries have already been instituted. Many others can be expected.

In a similar way the bureau has undertaken a study of the provisions and needs for the temporary care of Jewish children in New York City; a study of the Jewish delinquent girl problem; a study of cöoperative credit agencies in New York City; a study of the care of the Jewish blind.

Under the Division of Inspections and Information comes a variety of activities. Among the most important, perhaps, is the investigation of institutions applying for admission to the Federation for the Support of Jewish Philanthropic Societies. Where the basis of admission of societies to the Federation is doubtful, they have been referred to the Bureau for a detailed investigation. In this way there have been inspected hospitals, dispensaries, institutions for children, relief societies and others. In each of these cases a thorough study is made of every phase of the institution's work and a lengthy report presented for the consideration of the committee on admissions of the Federation. Investigations are made also in response to requests for information from individuals, and advice is given to persons approached for the support of various philanthropic undertakings. Fraudulent organizations and improper solicitation of funds are followed up and an effort made to stop them. During the legislative session, the Bureau, through this division, acts as a center of information on bills presented in the legislature which concern Jewish philanthropic institutions. Organizations, either existing or proposed, which apply to the Bureau for the endorsement of their work are handled in this division. In such cases a careful study is made, sometimes extending into an actual survey, to discover the needs of the community for such work as is proposed. Duplication of effort is pointed out and often avoided. A specific example is the case of an organization doing work in infant hygiene and duplicating the work of the city milk stations conducted by the Department of Health. After a careful study of the situation this matter was brought to the attention of the splendid group of



women in charge of the work and though the organization was a recognized one and one of long standing it was decided to discontinue the work and to devote its energies in another and more necessary direction. Very early in the Bureau's history a request for endorsement was received from an institution which had been engaged in the temporary care of children for over two years. The character of this institution is indicated in the following statement from the bureau's report:

This institution is fortunate in having the services of a group of women who not only offer their time and interest, but who show an entire willingness to cooperate with other organizations in advancing the character of the work done by their institution. As has already been indicated, however, the alertness of the managers is offset to a considerable degree by the handicaps necessarily encountered through the absence of proper quarters and adequate equipment for the care of children.

The managers of this institution realized this deficiency and determined to leave their present building and move to other quarters. They were in a quandary, however, as to the best direction in which to expend their efforts. They did not know whether they were meeting in the proper way a specific need which was not already being handled elsewhere; they did not know whether their work warranted increased facilities, and if it did, where and how such facilities could best be provided. They were considering the transfer of their institution to new quarters, but no definite policy had been set down as the one to be followed for the future. Nor could this be done, because the management of this institution was at a loss as to the way in which it could best adapt itself to the most urgent needs of the Jewish community along the lines of the work which it was doing. It was for answers to these questions that the Bureau was led into a general study of the provisions and needs for temporary care of Jewish children in New York City.

Through this division of the Bureau's work very close and intimate cooperation is maintained with the Department of Public Charities of the City of New York, which regularly inspects all institutions subsidized by the city. The reports of the Department on Jewish institutions are submitted to the Bureau promptly after each inspection so that pressure can be exerted to remedy such

defects in management and equipment as are discovered. In similar fashion there is an exchange of information between the Bureau and the Russell Sage Foundation, as well as the Bureau of Advice and Information of the Charity Organization Society.

Cordial cöoperation exists also between the Bureau and the State Board of Charities. The Bureau is notified of all applications for certificates of incorporation on the part of the Jewish organizations, so that an investigation can be made and the Bureau's opinion submitted to the State Board of Charities before the certificate of incorporation is granted.

All of these avenues of cöoperation and sources of information have been constantly utilized during the existence of the Bureau for the gathering of a mass of information, which will continue to be more and more valuable as the work of the Bureau develops. It can be fairly expected that before another year has gone by there will be in the files of the Bureau a report of complete investigation on nearly every institution doing Jewish work in New York City. In the course of regular work there is being accumulated a mass of bibliographical material which will be a valuable part of the Bureau's files. The value of such a center of information, both from the purely research standpoint as well as for practical reasons, need hardly be emphasized here. Each request for an investigation of an institution or an organization has been used as an opportunity for gathering detailed and complete information with regard to all phases of its work. Though this has meant occasionally devoting more time of the staff members to any particular request than the immediate needs might demand it was felt that for future purposes it was important to gather as complete information as was available. It is intended at regular intervals to check up these reports and bring them to date. Any changes in the work of an institution which come to the notice of the Bureau are noted in the report.

As I indicated before, the Bureau does not have a Division of Accounting and Record-keeping, although during the course of an institutional investigation a careful study is always made of the methods of record-keeping and the methods of accounting. Through such a division an effort would be made to introduce in all institutions proper methods of record-keeping. An important branch of the work of this division would be scientific budget making, as well as the standardization of accounting methods in institutions. A division, including a Training School for Research Workers and the direction of Personal Service, might be tied up



with the present Jewish School for Communal Workers, the Bureau providing the practical field training for students enrolled in the school. The division might also well act as a central point for the mobilization of volunteer workers and their direction into proper fields of personal service.

Now then, what does this Bureau mean to New York City? It means that we have an expert body holding a watchful, surveying eye over our philanthropic activities; constantly analyzing the community's needs and recommending proper means for meeting such needs. New York City, in the Bureau, has an agency which acts as a center of information for contributors and beneficiaries alike—recommending to the former the merits for support of institutions asking assistance; recommending to the latter the institutions which stand ready to meet their specific needs. It has an organization which can maintain a proper relationship between public governmental bodies and private agencies. It has an organization which can promote proper cooperation among the many agencies engaged in philanthropic work and will see that their activities are properly coordinated. It has an agency which can insist that organizations seeking the support of the public maintain the high standards of work and management which should be required of them in a modern community.

What can such a Bureau mean to a smaller community? What can it mean, for example, in a city like Pittsburgh? Here it need not be limited to sectarian auspices. A bureau established under the joint auspices, let us say, of the Chamber of Commerce and the Central Council of Social Agencies, with an advisory committee, including persons thoroughly informed with regard to the different fields of social work, can do in Pittsburgh what the Bureau of Philanthropic Research is doing in New York. And the budget need not exceed \$5,000 per year.

Has the Bureau of Philanthropic Research possibilities for national scope? It has. In pure research work it can gather statistics and facts of importance to Jewish philanthropy throughout the country. In cooperation, perhaps, with the field bureau of the National Conference of Jewish Charities it can make surveys in interior communities by delegating one or more members of its staff to such work. When the need arises anywhere for an expert investigation of a single institution the Bureau can assign to the work a member of its staff who has developed the needed technique in the study of social problems

where they are perhaps most complex, together with the advice and support of the members of the Bureau's advisory committee, within whose work the institution under investigation would naturally come.

In conclusion I wish to say that in this short paper I have been able to touch upon but a few of the striking things in our year's experience. On the part of those directing the work of the Bureau there has been the desire to protect its absolute impartiality; and to so guide the work that under all circumstances the Bureau might be an agency of the whole Jewish community rather than the instrument of any section of that community.



















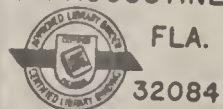






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